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Some of the farmers engaged in climate-smart agriculture in Yala. PHOTO: MOSES OWITI

Promoting climate-smart agriculture in Yala Swamp

By John Mwacharo

Agriculture is the source of livelihood for thousands of communities in Kenya, and food for us all. Unfortunately, climate change effects such as reduced or unpredictable rainfall and prolonged drought spells have had devastating effects on crop production. Many rural communities bear the brunt of these negative impacts, often being left vulnerable with little or no food.

To help communities better cope with current and future climate variability, Nature Kenya is promoting the adaptation of climate-smart agriculture in Yala Swamp. Under the AfriEvolve Project, local communities are being facilitated to acquire necessary skills and inputs to be more resilient to climate change effects on farming.

Through the project, supported by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and NABU (BirdLife partner in Germany), 150 farmers have been identified and supported to sustainably grow high-value climate-resilient vegetables and cereals under rain-fed agriculture. The vegetable and cereal types grown are fast maturing, require little rainfall and produce better yields than current crops. These farmers have received seeds and on-site technical support.

The project is also supporting agroforestry. Four community-based tree nursery groups were supported with equipment and seeds to produce tree seedlings for shade, fodder, firewood and fruit. Over 100,000 tree seedlings have been produced. Out of this, 51,000 tree seedlings are ready for planting to restore degraded riparian areas along River Yala and to establish woodlots. Twelve other community tree nurseries have been identified for agroforestry support. Kenya Forest Service (KFS) provides technical support for tree seedlings production.

Fish and poultry farming and beekeeping are the other nature-based enterprises promoted by Nature Kenya in Yala under this project. Three community-run fish ponds have been stocked with 3,000 tilapia fingerlings, with 30 fish farmers being trained on the basics of climate-smart fish production, formulation of quality feeds, packaging, storage and marketing technologies.

A poultry unit has been established and stocked with 200 improved indigenous chicken chicks, feeds and related equipment. Establishment of a second unit is underway. Communities have also been supplied with 100 modern beehives, honey harvesting gear and a processing unit.

The project lays emphasis on the transfer of knowledge and skills. Groups of crop farmers, fish farmers, poultry farmers and beekeepers have undergone training as 'trainer of trainers' (ToTs). Some of the things they have learned include bookeeping, value addition, packaging and marketing.

Yala Swamp is one of Kenya's important ecosystems. The swamp is the largest inland freshwater wetland complex in the country, sheltering a great variety of birds, fish and mammals, including some threatened ones. Yala Swamp provides useful environmental services like filtering out harmful pollutants from water flowing into Lake Victoria. The swamp is also a source of livelihoods for many communities.

Rare plant in Kilifi is under threat from limestone mining

Coastal Kenya holds many secrets. Among them is the rocky outcrop of Cha Simba in Kilifi County, which shelters some of the world's most iconic and rarest plants.

Hidden below the trees that cling to the rock outcrops is one of Africa's most famous plants, the African violet, generally known as *Saintpaulia*. The plants at Cha Simba are now specifically classified as *Streptocarpus ionanthus* subspecies *rupicola*. This subspecies is found in the wild only in Kenya, nowhere else in the world.

"African violets are popular house plants. But only three populations of this subspecies are known in the wild, only in Kilifi, and all of them are in danger of extinction," notes Dr Cornelius Kyalo, a botanist who has studied the genetics and ecology of the African violet at Cha Simba.

Thirty other plant species clinging to Cha Simba rocky outcrop are classified as threatened on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species.

And now extinction is a real prospect! A mining company, Mashujaa Q&M PLC, is planning to mine the Cha Simba rock outcrop for limestone. The company and its Environmental and Social Impact Assessment submitted to National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) are apparently unaware of the unique natural heritage threatened by their project.

Every extinction is tragic. An African violet and the other Critically Endangered, Endangered and Vulnerable plants do not need to be sacrificed for a little cement.

"It is critical that Kenya is seen to meet its obligations under the Convention on Biological Diversity," says Paul Matiku, Director of Nature Kenya. "Under this convention, it is Kenya's obligation to protect all globally threatened species that occur in Kenya. The proposed limestone mining will wipe out this subspecies."

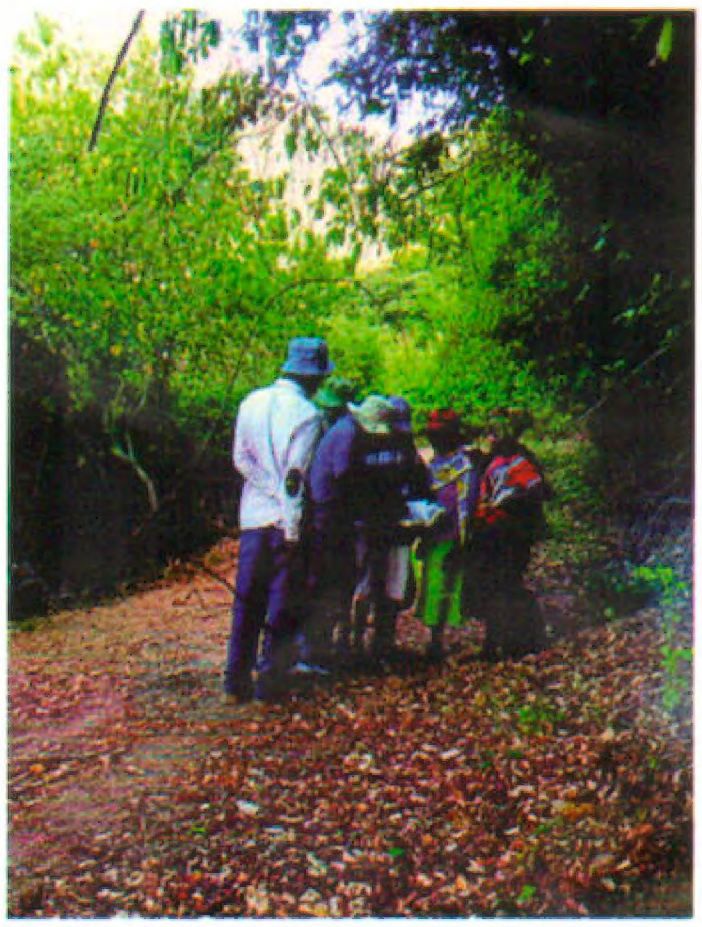
Nature Kenya is appealing to the Ministry of Petroleum and Mining, the Ministry of Environment, the Ministry of Sports, Culture and Heritage, the Ministry of Tourism and Wildlife, the National Environment Management Authority and the County Government of Kilifi to stop this move to extinction!

Nature Kenya is also urging the government to place Cha Simba rock outcrop under official protection and requesting mining companies to avoid Coastal limestone outcrops with unique plant species.

African Violet. PHOTO: CORNELIUS M. KYALO

Conserving the Hinde's Babbler in Mumoni and Mutitu

By James Mutunga



Members of Mumoni Site Support Group and an ornithologist from the National Museums of Kenya check the guidebook while monitoring Hinde's Babbler at Mumoni Hill forest in Kitui.
PHOTO: JAMES MUTUNGA

Local communities living near important natural habitats play a crucial role in conserving the unique wildlife found in these areas. Many wild animals in Kenya, including birds, live outside protected areas, in the community or privately owned land. By monitoring the state of birds and their habitats, these communities contribute immensely to tending to nature.

Birds are good indicators of the health of our environment. They are widespread, easy to spot and are considered important in cultures of various communities.

Hinde's Babbler is a rare bird found only in Kenya. This bird is threatened and occurs in fragmented populations within a 1,900km² range in Meru, Embu, Nyeri, Muranga, Kiambu, Nairobi, Machakos and Kitui counties. Hinde's Babblers live in groups, occupying a specific territory in thickets and woodlands in semi-arid areas and moist, fertile land cleared for farming but with fragments of shrub thickets. In eastern Kitui, Hinde's Babblers live in Mumoni and Mutitu Hills Forest Reserves and surrounding valleys dominated by *Lantana camara* and indigenous thickets.

Communities in these two sites are undertaking several initiatives to conserve the Hinde's Babbler and its habitat. Working closely with Nature Kenya and the National Museums of Kenya, members of the Mumoni and Mutitu Site Support Groups (SSGs) have mapped areas where the birds live. Constant monitoring of these areas is ongoing to observe any changes or disturbunces. In addition, the two SSGs are conducting public awareness sessions within their localities. These sessions seek to sensitize local communities on the importance of conserving the Hinde's Babbler's natural habitat.

Knowledge of the bird amongst the local communities is steadily increasing in Mumoni and Mutitu. This is exemplified by the communities' willingness to maintain and restore suitable habitats for the birds. The SSGs are also actively engaged in forest restoration activities.

Hinde's Babbler. PHOTO: PETER USHER

Tree Planting Season

Tree planting at the Thogoto forest block with the Privatisation Commission to restore Kereita forest.

Coca-Cola Beverages Africa - Kenya staff participating in a tree planting exercise at the Naro Moru forest block in Mt. Kenya.

Members of the Mwaroko Youth Group planting trees at Chawia forest, Taita hills.

For updates visit
www.naturekenya.org

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GLOBAL **BIG** DAY *round up*

By Richard Kipng'eno

Bird watchers in Kenya joined the rest of the world in participating in the Global Big Day on May 14. On this day, birders from around the world venture out to enjoy birds and submit their observations through the eBird mobile app. The day is also celebrated as the World Migratory Bird Day.

Seventeen Site Support Groups (SSGs) affiliated to Nature Kenya took part in the event in Tana River Delta, Mumoni Hill forest, Lake Elmenteita, Mt. Kenya, Sabaki River mouth, Mutitu Hill forest, Dunga Swamp, Kereita Forest, Kinangop grasslands, Mida Creek, Dakatcha Woodland, Yala Swamp, Lake Ol' Bolossat, Maasai Mara, Taita Hills forests, Arabuko-Sokoke Forest and Gede Ruins Key Biodiversity Areas (KBAs).

Kenya was ranked 9th in the world with 739 species with 293 checklists completed. Top Kenyan eBirder was Henry ole Sanoe from Lake Elmenteita Community-based Organization, the Nature Kenya site support group for Lake Elmenteita KBA with 201 species. The country's top hotspot was Nairobi National Park with 213 species – in one day.

Below are some photos of the event from 1. Mumoni hill, 2. Sabaki River Mouth, 3. Maasai Mara, 4. Dakatcha Woodland and 5.Tana River Delta.

1

2

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Evening (and Morning) Sky

By Fleur Ng'weno

As the Earth travels around the sun, we see different stars at different times of the year. As the moon travels around the Earth, we see part of its sunlit face in a different place each night. And as the Earth turns around each day, the sun, and the stars, moon and planets, seem to move from east to west.

Planets June '22

The planets travel around the sun, like the Earth. Since they are at different distances from the Earth and travel at different speeds, their positions and sometimes brightness seems to change. All five planets that we see with the unaided eye are in the morning sky this month.

In June 2022, Venus is big, bright and beautiful low in the sky above the sunrise. Small but bright Mercury rises below Venus until mid-month, when it sinks again towards the horizon. The reddish star Aldebaran appears to be near Mercury on June 24, near Venus on the 30th. The narrow, waning crescent moon seems near Venus on June 26, near Mercury on the 27th.

Bright Jupiter and smaller, reddish Mars are high in the eastern sky at dawn. They appear to be close together at the start of the month, then Jupiter rises higher. Mars grows brighter as its orbit brings it closer to Earth. The waning crescent moon is near Jupiter on June 21 and 22, and near Mars on the 22nd and 23rd.

Saturn looks like a bright star, high overhead at dawn. Planets, however, reflect the sun's light and shine steadily, while stars produce light and sparkle. Saturn moves towards the west during June. The waning moon is fairly near Saturn on June 18 and 19.

June Stars

The constellation Leo the Lion is high in the west. You can imagine the bright star Regulus as the heart of the lion. From Regulus, a line of stars forms a half-circle, like the head and mane of a lion.

Arcturus, a sparkling orange star, is high in the north. The blue-white star Spica is almost overhead. The constellation of the Scorpion is rising in the southeast: Look for three stars in a bowed line, and below, the bright reddish star Antares. The moon is near Regulus on June 5 and 6, near Spica on the 10th and near Antares on the 13th.

Low in the northwest is the constellation of the Plough or Big Dipper. Can you see this constellation as a dipper – a deep, long-handled spoon for scooping up water?

In the south, the beautiful constellation of the Southern Cross stands upright. It tilts towards the west during the evening. Two very bright stars, Alpha and Beta Centauri, seem to point toward the Southern Cross.

Moon '22 June

First quarter (half lit at sunset) June 7. Full moon, June 14; it's a "supermoon" – a little closer and brighter than usual. Last quarter (half lit at dawn), June 21. New moon, June 29.

June sun

June 21 is the solstice, when the North Pole is most tilted towards the sun. Here on the equator, from mid-March to mid-September we see the sun in the northern part of the sky during the day.

More info on Websites

EarthSky: http://earthsky.org/ You can subscribe to their daily e-mail newsletter

Sky and Telescope: http://www.skyandtelescope.com/ You can subscribe to their weekly e-mail newsletter

Missed out on any of our virtual talks?

Watch recordings of the talks and other videos on our YouTube channel

https://www.youtube.com/c/NatureKenyaEANHS/

Wednesday Morning Birdwalks in Nairobi
Please observe Covid-19 protocols as needed: wear or bring masks and meet at designated venues.

1st June, 2022 – Museum Grounds/Michuki Memorial Park. Meet at 8 am in the open space in front of the entrance to the museum galleries.

8th June, 2022 – Manguo Ponds, Limuru. Meet at 8.30am in the Manguo Ponds. Directions: Coming from the City Centre, take Nairobi – Nakuru Highway. Turn right a few metres after Limuru Bridge into the wetland.

15th June, 2022 – Mamba Village. Meet at 8.30am at the entrance to Mamba Village. Directions: Coming from the City Centre, take Langata Road. Turn right onto Langata North Road just after Nairobi Academy. It is about 500m to the entrance.

22nd June, 2022 – Karen Blixen Museum. Meet at 8.30am in the Museum's Car Park area. Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. Turn left at Shell Petrol Station onto Karen Road. The Museum is about 1.5Kms after Karen Country Club.

29th June, 2022 – City Park. Meet at 8.30 am at the parking near the Coca Cola Kiosk. Directons: Coming from the City centre, take Limuru Road past Aga Khan Hospital. Make a U-turn at Total Energies Petrol Station, Limuru Road. Drive back along Limuru Road and turn left onto City Park Road next to City Park Market.

Sunday Birdwatch

19th June. Sunday Bird Watch – Ngong Road Forest Sanctuary. Meet at 8:30 am at the Main Gate. (There's a Sanctuary fee of Ksh. 100 for citizens.) Directions: Coming from the city centre, take Ngong Road towards Karen. After Jamhuri Sports Ground take the first left turn (**before** the Commonwealth Cemetery). It's 500m to the Sanctuary main gate.

If you have questions, please write to news@naturekenya.org or phone 0780-149200.

Bird Ringing at Nairobi National Museum grounds grounds usually take place on Tuesday mornings. Please confirm with Titus Imboma on Imbomati911@gmail.com or Phone 0721-649452.

Thursday Birdwalks in Malindi
2nd June, 2022 – Muyeye. Meet at 4:00pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

9th June, 2022 – Malindi Harbor. Meet at 4:00pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

16th June, 2022 – Mtangani via Light Academy. Meet at 4pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

23rd June, 2022 – At Ganda along Malindi – Tsavo East Road. Meet at 3:30pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office.

30th June, 2022 – Moi Village to Sabaki Bridge. Meet at 4:00pm at the Museum near Nature Kenya Membership Office

25th June. Saturday Bird Watch - Arabuko Sokoke Forest. Meet at the forest gate at 7:00am.

For more information, contact Amina Simba at malindimembers@naturekenya.org or aminasimba6@gmail.com or phone: 0725 223042.

Tree Walk
By Nature Kenya
Plants Committee
Venue: National Museums of Kenya
Meet at Nairobi Museum main gate
Date: Friday 24th June Time: 9:00 AM
Contact: 0780 149200 or 0726 006283

Mombasa Birdwalks are held the 3rd Saturday of each month. To check meeting time and place, check Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/FFJmombasa/>

Or contact: Taibali Hamzali <thamzali@gmail.com> / 0733-980540

or Kelvin Mazera <klvnrua@yahoo.com> / 0720-928783

Send your birding records to:
Kenya Bird Map <http://kenya.birdmap.africa/>
If you have questions re KBM, write to <kenyabirdmap@naturekenya.org>

Stay updated with the birding scene in Kenya by signing in to the new **Kenyabirdsnet** platform on Google Groups at:
https://groups.google.com/d/forum/kenyabirdsnet

After signing in you will be able to post your records at:
kenyabirdsnet@googlegroups.com

Cha Simba Limestone outcrops. PHOTO: CORNELIUS M. KYALO

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Schools, Clubs	1,500
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For details on associated groups such as Youth Committee, Succulenta, and Friends of Nairobi Arboretum, City Park or Arabuko-Sokoke Forest, contact office@naturekenya.org